DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 546 FL 010 345

AUTHOR Barnett, Jenny
TITLE A Functional Syllabus for Post-Intermediate E.S.L. in Papua New Guinea.
PUB DATE Dec 77
NOTE 11p.
JOURNAL CIT Australian Review of Applied Linguistics; v1 n1 p10-9 Dec 1977

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Objectives; *English (Second Language); *Language Guides; *Language Role; Language Usage; Psycholinguistics; Secondary Education; *Second Language Learning; Sociolinguistics; Student Needs; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Papua New Guinea

ABSTRACT

A functional syllabus for post-intermediate study of English as a second language (ESL) that was developed for the provincial high schools in Papua New Guinea is described. The framework necessary to analyze student needs and define learning objectives is based on languages uses. A "language use" is a semantic unit identifying the language user's immediate intended purpose in discourse. These communicative purposes are either primarily seeking to control behavior or primarily seeking to inform. Every language use is characterized by particular categories of accompanying referential meaning. These concepts may be (1) essentially subjective, requiring evaluation; (2) objective, involving data; or (3) logical, showing relationships between ideas. Language use as a framework relates communicative meaning and referential meaning and allows also for social and personal meanings. A single language use can be expressed in small or large units of discourse, including a discourse, an event, a development, a move, or an act. Breaking language use into units helps to analyze student needs, provides a framework for learning activities, and suggests meaningful situations of practice. Development of the syllabus and training of teachers are discussed. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D.E. Ingram

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED172546

FL010345

A FUNCTIONAL SYLLABUS FOR POST-INTERMEDIATE E.S.L. IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Jenny Barnett

We have a rather unusual English language teaching situation in Papua New Guinea schools, but I think the functional approach used in the high schools has definite relevance for some of Australia's own language teaching situations, particularly in migrant education and in the Northern Territory, and also perhaps for the teaching of English as a first language.

THE LANGUAGE TEACHING SITUATION

Papua New Guinea children start to learn English as soon as they enter primary school. It is the language of instruction throughout formal education. The level of English attained after the six years of primary schooling is very much determined by the level of the teacher model. This non-native English speaker and the books in the school are often the only input sources, although urban children do have further access to English language situations. Thirty percent of primary school leavers go on to high schools. These are selected on a regional basis to encourage parity in national development, and naturally there is a resultant lack of parity in standards of high school entrants.

The provincial high schools offer a four year course to sixty percent of the intake, and a two year course to forty percent. It is the four year course which is called post-intermediate in the title. The term is necessarily vague. The first year intake is always a very mixed group, with the village children often considerably less confident and fluent initially than their urban counterparts. Standards also vary widely from one school to the next. Again in the high schools the level of English is much influenced by the teacher model who is increasingly frequently a non-native speaker.

Papua New Guinea secondary teachers have only two years of teacher training and (in common with many teachers worldwide) may well find themselves teaching English when in fact they have been trained to teach Maths or Science. They may be very fluent speakers of English but they are not normally grammar-conscious. Mistakes in English forms are common. These teachers are in fact much more credible as models of communicative competence than as models of linguistic competence. They are much more capable of teaching a syllabus focussing on communication through English forms than of teaching a syllabus focussing on the formal systems of English *a priori*.

One of the reasons for the introduction of a new syllabus was this increase in non-native English-speaking teachers with the very short training period. Another reason was the changing language needs of most high school students.

In the past, high school leavers could reasonably expect a lifetime of income-earning employment. This is no longer the case. More and more we are teaching English in the high schools primarily for the purposes of formal education and only secondarily for specific social, professional or commercial interactions. High school students basically

need a command of English which will enable them to handle the learning situation. Many of them indeed perceive English as a classroom language only. These children need English for learning, for the development of concepts, and for problem-solving in exactly the same way as a first language child needs it.

A FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE SYLLABUS

A functional syllabus for language teaching is based in a sociolinguistic view of language as purposeful, meaningful behaviour. The subject matter is language *use*. The goal of teaching is for students to be able to use English for their own purposes in the situations in which they are likely to find themselves. It is a goal of restricted communicative competence.

This view of the subject matter has particular implications for different components of the instruction process -

a) for the analysis of student needs,

b) for the description of learning objectives,

c) for the selection and grading of objectives,

d) for teaching practice and the design of materials.

The major part ofthis paper is concerned with the framework necessary to deal with the first two components.

The term *functional* as it is used here does not only refer to what is sometimes known as the *communicative function*, or *functional meaning* (i.e. the social purpose of the utterance). It refers also to the *conceptual function* or *conceputal meaning* (i.e. the conceptual focus of the utterance). Thus what we are here calling a *functional syllabus* is what Wilkins has called a *notional syllabus*.

CONTENT CATEGORIES FOR A FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE SYLLABUS

In order to analyse student needs and to define objectives, we need firstly a descriptive framework for our subject matter - language as use. We need a set of content categories which will start from communicative competence and incorporate linguistic competence. In a functional view of language, the basic content categories concern the particular purposes for which we use language at any one time. For example, we use language to ask for help, to make a suggestion, to describe an object so that someone else can find it, to give a reason for an action, to make a comparison, and so on. In the Papua New Guinea provincial high school syllabus these are called Language Uses, as a constant reminder of the practical focus of teaching.

LANGUAGE USES

Language Uses are similar to what have been called communicative functions in recent work in England by Wilkins, Widdowson, and others. However they are broader than these in that they incorporate notional meaning into the system. This makes for a simpler and yet comprehensive framework of teaching content.

A Language Use, then, is a semantic unit - a semantic unit identifying the language user's immediate intended purpose in discourse. These communicative purposes are either primarily seeking to control

behaviour, or primarily seeking to inform. These two goals provide three groups of Language Uses: Control, Informing, and Enquiry. These groups can be described according to the type of effect the speaker expects his utterance to have. If he expects his utterance to effect a change in the sociolinguistic situation, he is performing what wehave called a Control Use. This group includes

a) Austin's performatives which actually change the situation merely by their utterance, e.g., sentencing a prisoner, resigning, accepting an offer, marrying a couple, and

b) a range of direct and indirect regulatory acts, e.g., giving instructions, giving advice, making suggestions.

Control Uses focus on getting something done and necessarily refer to projected time. If the speaker expects primarily a mental or emotional reaction to his utterance then he is performing an Informing Use. This group includes narration, description of all sorts, explanations, argument and so on. The Enquiry group expects nothing more than an Informing Use in response. They include asking for confirmation or denial, asking for the time, for details, for a reason, and so on. The Concepts discussed below are generally the focus of Informing and Enquiry Uses.

The Language Use as a semantic unit is expressed in actual discourse through grammar, lexis, and phonology as a unit of discourse. For example "I'm very sorry" is a unit of discourse expressing an Apology Language Use.

A Language Use is a general category of purpose. It restricts the range of possible referential meanings but does not determine actual referents. We can recognise the above example as an apology even though without context we do not know what the apology refers to.

Every Language Use is characterised by particular categories of accompanying referential meaning. In the Papua New Guinea syllabus these are simply called Concepts. The concept of future time, for example, is a feature of only a limited number of Language Uses, e.g., predictions, warnings, suggestions, promises and plans. Chronological sequence is a typical feature of instructions, stories and descriptions of process. Negation is a concept typical of denials and contradictions.

These concepts can be identified with what Wilkins has called notional meaning which includes both semantico-grammatical categories and modal meaning.

Concepts common in everyday use of English are limited in number and can be tentatively listed. They include concepts of three types:

a) essentially subjective concepts requiring evaluation,

b) concepts allowing for objectivity involving data,

c) logical concepts showing relationships between ideas.

a) Concepts requiring evaluation:

validity (truth value, a scale including negation, doubt and belief),

probability (a scale including certainty and possibility)

attitudes (a scale of personal feeling).

b) Concepts allowing for objectivity:

manner action or event and related concepts, object of action, instrument (actor), beneficiary, state of affairs, and related concepts,

volition (needs, obligation, ability, right, intention).

c) Relational concepts:

emphasis

classification (+ inclusion and restriction)

addition

contrast

place relations

time sequence

example

alternatives

comparison

repetition

summary

cause (+ reason)

result

purpose

condition

conclusion (+ evidence)

generalisation

Traditional grammars identify all of these in one way or another generally starting from the lexico-grammatical structures which signal them. Wilkins includes them in his categories of notional content mainly under the semantico-grammatical and modal headings, although some of the relational concepts are set down under communicative functions concerning rational enquiry and exposition. These Concepts can either be features typical of a particular Language Use, as probability is of predictions, or they can themselves be the focus of a Language Use. Examples are: giving a reason, making a comparison, identifying purposes or goals, classifying, generalising, giving evidence, and so on.

Taking the Language Use as the basic content category in a description of language behaviour draws together the different types of meanings expressed in language. It relates communicative meaning and referential meaning and allows also for social and personal meanings. For example, a request must take the social situation into account and express social meanings such as role relations.

At the same time it will take personal attitude into account and express personal meanings such as intensity. Particular forms of English are typically expressive of the particular conceptual, social and personal meanings associated with any one Language Use. (This is not to say, of course, that any given meaning can only be expressed through a restricted set of forms.)

From the point of view of analysis, we recognise an example of a particular Language Use -

a) from the context which has given rise to it and given it referential meaning,

b) from the concepts represented,

c) from specific forms which signal it - lexico-grammatical structures and sometimes phonological features.

Sometimes we can identify a Language Use by form alone. For example, "May I?" is quite clearly a request for permission, signalled by the inversion, the modal, and the ? or intonation pattern. In contrast, it is impossible to identify "It's cold." as a Language Use without its context. It could be a description, a request for some form of heating, an apology ... we cannot tell.

For teaching purposes, a Language Use is described, firstly, in terms of its communicative purpose, secondly, in terms of the related concepts, thirdly, in terms of its typical linguistic forms. The following example from the syllabus shows this at a very simple level.

Rules are a special kind of instruction. They focus on a second person and on his response. They are general statements concerning "all time" and "all people" unless exceptions are deliberately made.

Always think before you choose.

Never put kerosene in a soft drink bottle.

We use Rules in special situations - in places like schools or hospitals where a lot of people have to live together, in sports situations, in learning how to do new things, and particularly in dangerous situations. These situations involve particular types of ideas, as you can see from the examples.

School rules: *Students must be at Assembly on time.*

Hospital rules: *Visitors may not enter this ward. No entry.*

Sports rules: *Never tackle round the neck.*

Learning rules: *Do not use a wood saw on metal.*

Safety rules: *No smoking on the airstrip. Smoking on the airstrip is forbidden.*

The type of information that typically goes with Rules includes: place, time, reason or purpose, and sometimes exceptions or alternatives.

Never strike a match near a petrol container, because petrol catches fire easily/ otherwise it might catch fire.

These are some of the structures that signal meanings in Rules:

Command idea:	Base form of the verb with no formal subject (imperative)
	do + *not* + base verb with no formal subject
	subject + *must/may (not)* + base verb
	noun + passive forbidding verb
	no + noun
All-people idea:	plural nouns without *the*
	all/no + plural noun, *everyone* etc.
All-time idea:	*always/never/at all times*, etc.
	verb forms as above
Place information:	prepositional phrases and their substitutes
	where clauses
Point of time:	point of time signals
Reason:	*because*
Purpose:	*so that/in order to/to*
Exceptions:	*except/other than/apart from*
Alternatives:	*otherwise/or else.*

UNITS OF DISCOURSE

A single Language Use can be expressed in small or large units of discourse. For example, a description of a dinosaur can be a ten word entry in a dictionary, a paragraph or more in an encyclopaedia, or a whole book complete with pictures. An explanation can take only a moment or fill a whole lesson period. We can say thank you without even a word, or we can make a speech of it.

For the analysis of language as use it is necessary to establish units of discourse, such as Searle's speech act and Hymes speech event. For teaching purposes the following set of units is useful although there is insufficient evidence as yet to confirm their validity. The similarity to Sinclair and Coulthard's work is evident, but they make no claim that the units they identified for classroom interaction do in fact extend to general discourse types.

1. A discourse.

   A discourse is a large piece of language use. Its name usually tells us something about its function and typical setting, and sometimes also whether it is written or spoken.

   Examples are: a committee meeting; a classroom lesson; a church service; and a textbook.

2. An event.

   A discourse is made up of a series of events, each with its own function, and its own main idea. The names of events usually tell us something about function, and something about the forms of language use. Examples are:

   discussion on an agenda item; a lesson warm-

up; a set of prayers (such as the litany); and a chapter or section in a textbook.

3. A development.

Each event is made up of a series of smaller developments. In conversation, these would be exchanges on a particular topic, for a particular purpose. They can also be paragraphs or groups of tightly related paragraphs. The names of developments and smaller units are generally also the names of Language Uses.

Examples are:

Questions and answers concerning an agenda item; a testing question plus response and evaluation; a blessing and associated responses; a topic sentence (or focus) and its related sentences (expansion).

4. A move.

Developments are made up of one or more moves. The name is taken from the game of chess, where each move takes into account the one before and tries to influence the move following after. In conversation, every time there is a new speaker, there is also a new move. Within a monologue, every time the ideas move in a new direction, there is a new move.

Examples are:

a request for information; a test question; a blessing; an information focus (topic sentence); a conclusion.

5. An act.

Moves are made up of one or more acts. These are the smallest units of language use. The acts within a move are always closely related: one may identify cause, and the other effect. Each time the function changes, the act changes.

Examples are:

giving a reason; repeating; saying amen; making a contrast within a move; justifying a conclusion.

To summarise, we can work through part of a very common discourse: conversation associated with the evening meal.

Events:

getting everyone to stop what they are doing and come to the table; serving; the different conversations while eating; second helpings; clearing away.

Developments within the first event above:

calling people to table; seating people; chasing up a late comer; sending a child to wash his hands; fetching a forgotten spoon; a "What's for dinner?" exchange.

Moves within the first development could include ones like these three:

"Alright people! Dinner's ready! Kate! Ben! Come and have dinner."

"Coming!"

"I won't be long. I just want to finish this page."

And finally, acts within the first move example are:

bidding for attention; informing; calling an individual; giving an instruction.

Breaking language use up into units helps us to analyse student needs. It also gives us a framework for learning activities, and suggests meaningful situations of practice. For initial or remedial teaching, we can focus on the smaller units - acts and moves - while for extension teaching, we can focus on larger units.

LANGUAGE USES AS SYLLABUS CONTENT

The analysis of student needs in the Papua New Guinea provincial high schools was based on a study of classroom situations, a study of all subject syllabuses and teachers' guides, a limited study of school social interaction, and a yet more limited study of school leavers' activities.

The learning aspect of student needs showed an emphasis on instructions, description of all types, explanation, narration, making predictions, making comparisons and generalisations, problem-solving, testing, and disciplining. School social interaction in English is unfortunately often minimal. Nevertheless a large range of Uses can occur, including some that are not very typical of the classroom, such as greeting and making contact, introductions, thanks, invitations, apologising, making plans, giving advice, complaining, and making an application. English needs for school leavers returning to the village focus on printed labelling and instructions, ordering of goods, and occasional form-filling. For school leavers taking on employment or further education, the needs are obviously much more varied - the specialised Uses would have to be learnt by individuals in real-life situations.

The selection of Language Uses in the Papua New Guinea provincial high school syllabus was based upon this analysis of student needs, taking into account the known features of communicative and linguistic competence typified by high school students in each grade.

Grading of content is determined by student needs, conceptual complexity, and the step-by-step accumulation of conceptual and formal data. For example, Giving Directions is first taught after Instructions, and after Describing Where, since it calls for concepts and structures basic to each of these. Each Language Use can be expressed through a variety of forms, some much simpler to handle than others. Thus it is quite possible to report details of an experiment without using the past passive at all even though a fluent speaker would tend to do so in order to express the relative unimportance of the actor. We can of course teach a Language Use at progressively more complex conceptual and formal levels, as well as in progressively larger units of discourse. Thus spiralling is built in to the syllabus.

It has been necessary to make continuing checks throughout the preparation of the syllabus, to try and ensure that not only were the required Language Uses being taught, revised, and retaught in greater depth, but that the desired range of formal realisations was also being taught. As the trialling of the syllabus and materials proceeds, inadequacies of this kind may possibly come to light.

LANGUAGE USES AS UNITS OF TEACHING

A major advantage of taking Language Uses as the unit of learning and teaching is that it provides for an integrated module of study. This is both economical of learning time, and motivating to students. In the past, the week's language programme has tended to be somewhat disjointed: grammar lessons which are not reinforced by the reading comprehension, written work which is not based on the grammar being practised, the "oral" lesson which is a time unto itself, and the vocabulary lesson which at best is usually only related to a comprehension passage. The thematic approach provides an intellectual link between lessons, but while this may be motivating, it does not in itself guide the learner's understanding of language as use.

The situational approach does convey language as use but it has the drawback that concepts and structures are not systematically covered - any number of Uses can occur at the airport, and hence a like variety of structures. Taking Language Uses as the unit of learning and teaching gives control over the concepts, structures, situations and topics introduced and allows for a spiralling development.

Learning to understand a given Language Use and to produce it whenever the situation calls for it requires practice through each of the four mode skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing. It requires grammar study that focusses on the forms which realise the concepts basic to the Language Use. Structures are studied because they are *necessary* to a Language Use, not because they are next on the list. Vocabulary is practised as a necessary part of the Language Use in situations.

Teaching practice for a functional syllabus has much in common with that of the Situational Method. The new Language Use is introduced through a situation where possible, or alternatively as a listening or reading passage which is a model of it. The teacher focusses attention on the relevant concepts and their formal realisations, and pairs practice dialogues or questions and answers from cues. Comprehension practice is based on different models of the Language Use in larger units of discourse, or mixed up with familiar Uses. Oral and written work is often derived from comprehension work but in any event the goal is to produce an example of the Language Use in response to a meaningful call for it. Real or pseudo-communicative activities are used as much as possible.

Consolidation activities are designed to require understanding and/or performance of the Language Use. A treasure hunt practises Instructions and Describing Place; library research into the uses of a product practises Identifying Purpose; a quizz or an interview can practise asking for and giving certain types of information; a class or school suggestions box calls for suitably worded suggestions. Early learning activities, on the other hand, can be much more controlled, but drills are ideally given only after students have been made aware of the end goal of the module through receptive comprehension activities. Even then, where the traditional approach would drill a structure through transformations, *(Tom has made the room dark/ Tom has darkened the room)*, we would use a dialogue practising description and instruction *(The room is too bright/ Darken it then)*.

Teachers in Papua New Guinea are themselves already beginning to develop activities and materials to support the functional syllabus. However, it is considered important that teachers should first become acquainted with the new content framework without being asked to suddenly change their teaching practice. In any event many of the old and tried techniques will continue to be useful within this framework. What is called for is gradual development of more communicative activities and the production of integrated materials to go with each Language Use.

* * * * * * * *

REFERENCES

Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things With Words*, Oxford; Clarendon Press; 1962.

Barnett, J.A., *The Functional View of Language as a Basis for Language Pedagogy*, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Papua New Guinea.

Doughty, P.S., Pearce, J.J. and Thornton, G.M., *Language in Use*, London; Edward Arnold; 1971.

van Ek, J.A., *The Threshold Level*, Strasbourg; Council of Europe; 1975.

Halliday, M.A.K., "Functional diversity in language" in *Foundations of Language*, 6, 1970.

Hymes, D., "The ethnography of speaking", in J.A. Fishman (ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, The Hague; Mouton; 1968.

Peck, A.J., "Talking to some purpose" in G.E. Perren and J.L.M. Trim (eds.), *Applications of Linguistics*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press; 1971.

Searle, J.R., *Speech Acts*, Cambridge; Cambridge University Press; 1970.

Sinclair, J.M. and Coulthard, R.M., *Towards an Analysis of Discourse: the English used by Teachers and Pupils*, London; O.U.P.; 1975.

Widdowson, H.G., "Directions in the teaching of discourse" in Corder and Roulet, *Theoretical Linguistic Models in Applied Linguistics*, 1975.

Wilkins, D.A., *Second-language Learning and Teaching*, London; Edward Arnold; 1974.

Wilkins, D.A., *Notional Syllabuses*, London; Oxford University Press; 1976.